



U.S. Immigration  
and Customs  
Enforcement

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# News Release

## **Federal arrests made in Massachusetts in connection with take down of international "khat" trafficking ring**

*Massachusetts U.S. Attorney Charges Two and Manhattan U.S. Attorney Charges Forty-Two; Authorities Seize More Than \$10 Million Worth of East African Drug "Khat"*

BOSTON--Two Boston men were charged last week with federal drug violations as a part of a larger New York City-based investigation targeting a broad conspiracy to import and distribute the East African drug "khat" and laundering the drug sale proceeds. An Indictment relating to the New York investigation was unsealed today in federal court in Manhattan charging a total of forty-two men. Four Massachusetts residents were named in the New York Indictment, two of whom were arrested in Boston last night. The arrests of the remaining two Massachusetts men are still being sought.

United States Attorney Michael J. Sullivan; June W. Stansbury, Special Agent in Charge of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration in New England; and Matthew J. Etre, Acting Special Agent in Charge of Immigration and Customs Enforcement in New England, announced today that Ismacil Geelle and Liban Abdulle, of Boston, were charged last week in separate criminal complaints with conspiracy to distribute cathinone, a Schedule I controlled substance; conspiracy to import cathinone to the United States from overseas; conspiracy to commit international money laundering; and international money laundering. Two other men, Hassan Sadiq Mohamed and Abdulahi Hussein, also of Boston, were arrested late last night on the same charges, arising from the Indictment out of the Southern District of New York. Two other Boston men, Saeed Bajuun and Younas Haji, who are also charged in the New York Indictment, are still being sought.

According to the Complaint affidavits and the New York Indictment, it is alleged that all six men, along with others charged, are part of a nationwide network of Somali immigrants who import khat to the United States from Europe, distribute it to East African communities in New York, Boston, and other cities, and then wire most of the proceeds back overseas. Khat is a root grown primarily in the countries of Ethiopia and Kenya in East Africa. Among the active ingredients in khat are cathinone, a chemical stimulant classified as a Schedule I controlled substance, and cathine, a Schedule IV controlled substance.

Users of khat chew the leaves and young shoots of the plant, swallowing the juice and storing the

residue in the side of the mouth until the cheek visibly bulges. The primary effects of chewing khat are euphoria and stimulation, and side effects can include anorexia, heart disease, hypertension, cancer of the mouth, disorientation, gastric disorders, hallucinations, hyperactivity, hypertension, impotence, insomnia, outbursts of irrational violence and, in extreme cases, toxic psychosis.

Because khat loses its potency within 48 hours of being picked, after it is harvested in East Africa it is immediately flown to the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and other locations in Europe. From there, it is most commonly shipped by human courier or express overnight service to the United States and other countries with significant East African communities.

It is alleged that once the co-conspirators distributed and sold the khat domestically, the proceeds were collected by certain co-conspirators and wired back to Europe. It is alleged that the funds were transmitted through traditional wire serves like Western Union, but also through the hawala system. Hawalas are informal money remittal networks commonly used in the Middle East and Africa to transfer money and which operate outside normal, traceable banking channels.

Overall, the conspiracy charged in the New York Indictment and Massachusetts Complaints involves over 25 tons of khat and over \$10 million in proceeds from its sale.

If convicted on these charges, the defendants each face up to 20 years' imprisonment, to be followed by at least 3 years of supervised release, and a fine of up to \$1 million.

The case was investigated by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration and Immigration and Customs Enforcement. It is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Andrew E. Lelling in Sullivan's Organized Crime and Drug Enforcement Task Force Unit.

The details contained in the Massachusetts Complaints and New York Indictment are allegations. The defendants are presumed to be innocent unless and until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

# ICE #

*U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of four integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.*